

SYMBOLS OF CONSERVATISM AT A TIME OF UNCERTAINTY

A Senior Scholars Thesis

by

DANISH SALEEM MOTI

Submitted to the Office of Undergraduate Research
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the designation as

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOLAR

April 2007

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ABSTRACT

Symbols of Conservatism at a Time of Uncertainty (April 2007)

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Traditional research on political parties suggests that there are certain routes that each party should take to secure support for their policies. Republicans have found success by campaigning on symbols and more abstract issues. Democrats have found success by picking up issues that reflect the people's values. These have been the traditional norms in social politics, but I believe it would be interesting to see how valid these truths are presently.

The traditional models for political parties are worth examining today because of new factors that are more relevant than ever before. Some of these elements include terrorism, national security, and Iraq. There is reason to believe that the models for success have shifted over time because of the mentioned factors. There are a limited number of issues that one can expect people to be attentive to. Add the elements brought about after 9/11, and now it is difficult to balance social issues with foreign policy. Recent politics by both parties seem to have fallen back on "valance" issues, or simply promoting issues that

there is general consensus for. Furthermore, issues that have no clearly developed sides are avoided until there is reasonable support for one solution.

James A. Stimson comments on the traditional methods that both parties utilize to find support for their policies. In his book, *Tides of Consent* (2004), Stimson explains the fluctuations in preferences for liberal and conservative policies. He explains that a sizeable portion of the population still expresses their preference for policy based on the traditional notions about political parties. Traditional notions still correlate Democrats with the New Deal politics and increased government spending. Republicans are linked with shrinking the spending and limiting the influence of the government in the day-to-day affairs of the people. However, to even the slightly alert political observer, it is clear to note that the two parties do not reflect their traditional selves.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. David Peterson for advising my thesis and guiding me through the research and writing process. I would also like to thank the Office of Undergraduate Research for presenting an opportunity to design and complete my own thesis.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: TRADITIONAL FLOW OF PUBLIC OPINION

In the election process, a political party's function is to mobilize and educate their voters. To maximize vote share each party makes a decision on the way they want to construct their campaigns. With this in mind, it is worth noting what type of campaign the electorate is the most receptive to. I want to determine whether campaigns run on symbols or campaigns run on specific issues are more likely to influence voter turnout.

James A. Stimson, in his book, *Tides of Consent*, illustrates the point that generally, more than 50% of Americans are operationally liberal and symbolically conservative (2004). This influences the way Republicans and Democrats conduct their campaigns. Republicans understand the value of their "conservative" label and flash symbols of conservatism at every opportunity. Democrats must shy away from the "liberal" label that has a negative connotation, and attract voters based on their policy stance.

Individuals who consider themselves as conservative but have liberal preferences, force political parties to adjust their campaign tactics for broader appeal (Stimson, 2004). These are the observations Stimson made with evidence he gathered before 2004. I

This thesis follows the style of *American Politics Research*.

tested the validity of this observation in the 2006 midterm elections. There is reason to retest Stimson's traditional notion because of the series of events that occurred after September 11th. After the attacks, the approval ratings for all branches of the government soared. Even the historically unpopular Congress witnessed unprecedented approval numbers, and labels like Republican and Democrat were largely ignored. However, the exact opposite was true in the Fall of 2006. America was more politically polarized than it had been in recent years. In the midterm elections, the President was the most polarizing force and continued to divide voters with claims that dictated the opposing Democratic Party as "the party of cut and run" (Rutenberg, 2006).

Campaigns for the 2006 midterm election were particularly nasty because of the Iraq War. As the war casualties surpassed 3,000 for the American troops in Iraq, and spending on the war strained the federal budget, the American people grew weary. President Bush and many in his Republican Party believed it was necessary to "stay the course" in Iraq until the new Iraqi government could manage its own affairs. The President consistently made the case that "we will help them [Iraqis] fight and defeat the terrorists there, so we do not have to face them here at home" (Bush, 2006). The counterargument that many Democrats and a small number of Republicans made was that the war had been too costly economically and in lives, and they favored some type of withdrawal. Iraq was not the only issue going into the November 7th election, but according to many Americans, it was the number one overall issue (Nagourney and Thee, 2006).

The Problem Statement

As the debate over the appropriate exit strategy raged on, the citizens were left to decipher which party offered real solutions and which party offered only empty rhetoric. If one was to follow Stimson's observations, then Democratic victories in the midterm elections were to be expected. According to Stimson's model for preference for liberal policies, the longer the citizenry spent under one political party, the more they desired the policies of the opposing party.

FIGURE 1. Support for Liberal Policy

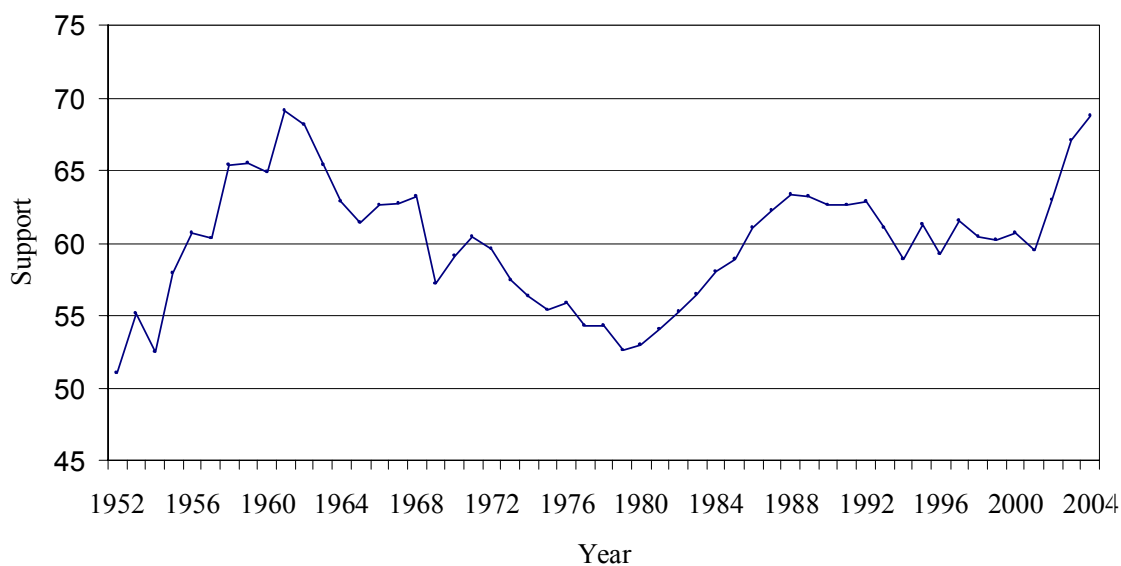


FIGURE1. is a graph created with data collected by Stimson that explains the preference for liberal policies over time (Stimson, 2006). In it, he points out that when a Democrat

was in office, preference for liberal policies eroded (Stimson, 2004). Then when a Republican was in office, the preference for liberal policies increased. When Democrats Kennedy and Johnson were President in the 60s, there was a decline in the preference for liberal policies. When Republicans Reagan and H.W. Bush were President in the 80s, the preference for liberal policies increased. When Clinton, a Democrat, was President from 1993–2001, the preference for liberal policy held steady because of the Republican control of congress that started in 1994. The data shows that since President George W. Bush’s inauguration in 2001, preference for liberal policy has increased every year. It is crucial to note that this data illustrates the preference for policies like taxes, healthcare, and education; not war and terrorism (Stimson, 2004).

The question I seek answer to with my experiment is, *“Does Stimson’s concept of the flow of preference for liberal policy hold true in a time of war and uncertainty?”*

Stimson already notes that Republican symbols prevail when the preference for liberal policy is low. Furthermore, Democratic policies’ win when there is high demand for liberal policy (Stimson, 2004). President Bush’s reelection over Senator Kerry (D-MA) was the first signal to suggest that the traditional notions do not hold true in the middle of a war and under constant threat of terrorism. Preference for liberalism in 2004 was the highest it had been in almost 50 years, but President Bush still won reelection. Does this mean that Republican symbols are more appealing in the time of uncertainty, or are symbols of security merely preferred over the specific issues that may offer security?

Furthermore, does a vote for a Democrat mean that the electorate has liberal preferences, or has the election come down to a referendum on an unpopular war?

Evidence suggests that the statewide elections for senators may have come down to a referendum on the Iraq War. At the same time, votes for governors and house representatives might have been cast based on more local issues. This trend, was visible in some of the most hotly contested races. Even the races within the state legislatures showed signs that for local elections, local issues, not the war, were the prominent issues. To help answer what types of campaigns were more effective and what type of campaign the electorate was more receptive to, I observed campaigns and campaign ads. If the candidates that ran campaigns on more specific local issues were elected, it would indicate that if the Iraq War is not the central issue, then Stimson's notion still holds true. The notion holds that liberal policies are in demand the longer the electorate is under a conservative administration and that campaigns run on specific liberal messages are likely to find success (Stimson, 2004). For the nationalized races that concentrated on terrorism and the Iraq War, if the winning candidate offered less specific liberal policy and more symbolic messages, then this would indicate that under uncertain circumstances like a time of war, Stimson's concept of the flow of public mood might not hold true. I observed the top eight races for governor and senate as ranked by the *National Journal*, based on the likelihood that these seats would switch parties.

TABLE 1. 2006 Governor Race Rankings

* Indicates Winner

Source: 2006 National Journal Group, Inc.	
1	New York Faso (R) 29% v. Spitzer (D) 69%* Incumbent Pataki (R) not running.
2	Ohio Blackwell (R) 37% v. Strickland (D) 60%* Incumbent Taft (R) not running.
3	Massachusetts Healey (R) 35% v. Patrick (D) 56% * Incumbent Romney (R) not running.
4	Colorado Beauprez (R) 41% v. Ritter (D) 56%* Incumbent Owens (R) reached term limit
5	Arkansas Hutchinson (R) 41% v. Beebe (D) 55%* Incumbent Huckabee (R) reached term limit
6	Minnesota Pawlenty (R) 47% * v. Hatch (DFL) 46% Incumbent Pawlenty (R) (Democratic Farmer Labor Party)
7	Maryland Ehrlich (R) 46% v. O'Malley (D) 53% * Incumbent Ehrlich (R)
8	Oregon Saxton (R) 43% v. Kulongoski (D) 51% * Incumbent Kulongoski (D)

CHAPTER II

GOVERNORS RACE ANALYSIS

*New York: Faso (R) v. Spitzer (D)**

Eliot Spitzer ran his campaign in a method that according to Stimson's concept, should grant him success. Spitzer focused on local issues that traditionally the liberals champion. The most notable aspect of Spitzer's website, www.spitzerpaterson.com, was the big red text boxes right in the center of the webpage. Some of the boxes state, "Education", "Jobs", and "Health Care". Not only do these text boxes indicate a campaign run on liberal policy, but there was more specific information available on all of the issues. His campaign ads offered a litany of specific issues like lowering the property tax burden on middle class families and raising tests scores and graduation rates by investing in schools. An ad titled, "TO DO LIST," went beyond the symbols it offered of middle class families and school children, and coupled them with Spitzer speaking about his agenda (Spitzer, 2006). Although there are several symbolic political ads on his website, Spitzer consistently returned to the message that "on day one, everything changes" and offered a variety of ways change would occur.

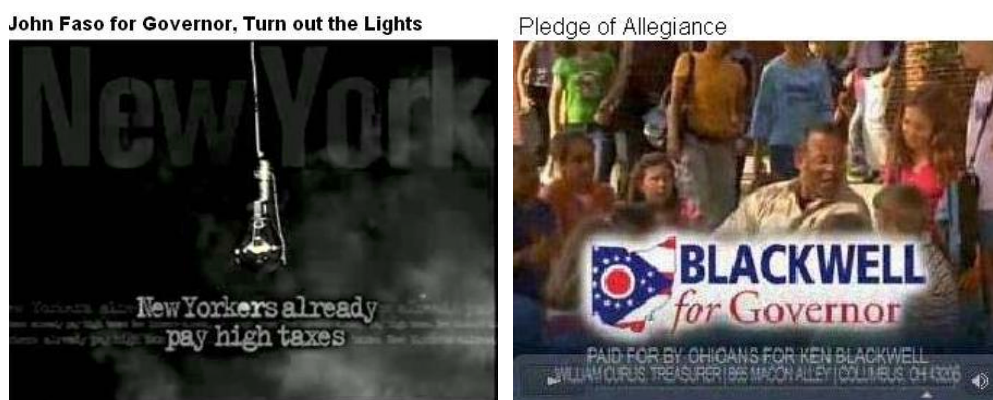
John Faso's campaign ads were a little harder to find because his website was promptly dismantled after his election loss. However, after searching through the online video archive *YouTube* and reading some of Faso's official statements in newspapers, one thing was clear. Faso certainly ran more of a negative campaign. He also focused less on

liberal policy that Stimson's model indicates should be popular under a conservative governor and president. Taxes were the focal point of several of Faso's campaign ads. The "Turnout the Lights" ad (FIGURE 2) stated that New Yorkers already paid the highest taxes in the nation and said that Spitzer supported special interest groups and would raise taxes (Faso, 2006). The final message in the ad said, as a light bulb flickered from seemingly being drained of energy, was that if Spitzer got his way, the last person left in the room should turnout the lights. In another ad, Faso stated his intention to abolish taxes for couples making less than \$50,000 and then seconds later stated, "You can bank on the fact that Eliot Spitzer will raise your taxes" (Faso, 2006). A *New York Times* Editorial (The Promise of Eliot Spitzer, 2006) noted the underdog status of John Faso. It noted the same elements that one could detect from observing his commercials. The primary component of Faso's campaign focused on tax cuts, but at the same time criticized Spitzer for promising more than he could deliver and for being a tax and spend Democrat.

New York's gubernatorial race supported Stimson's model for the flow of public opinion. Despite an unpopular war, in a more local race, Spitzer's campaign on liberal policy found a receptive audience. In this race and perhaps other races, it was beneficial for Democratic candidates in local elections to focus on specific liberal policy. Even though the Iraq War was unpopular, it was risky for a Democratic candidate to prime the electorate on issues that would inevitably bring the debate back to war and terrorism. The war was the same factor that disrupted Stimson's model of flow public opinion in

2004. The electorate's overwhelming belief that Republican's are tougher on terrorism was waning. A Bloomberg/LA Times Poll indicated that for the first time most Americans (54%) disapproved of the President's handling of terrorism (Przybyla, 2006). However, it would be more beneficial for a candidate to focus on liberal policy that is popular rather than fight for a portion of the electorate that is divided on the war. In a more national race like for the senate, this may not be the case.

FIGURE 2. Ads: Faso and Blackwell



*Ohio: Blackwell (R) v. Strickland (D) **

The Ohio gubernatorial race offered an interesting insight into the state of American politics in the Fall of 2006. Noting an unpopular war and an overall disenchantment with incumbents and specifically conservatives, the Republicans in tight races dropped their formerly popular Republican and conservative labels. In nine out of the ten campaign ads featured on Blackwell's website, only one ad specifically said "Republican" or "Conservative." However, promptly after saying "Republican" the ad said that he stood

against his own party “to defend the principles we hold dear” (Blackwell, 2006). The ad said “fiscal conservative once” and before it said conservative again, it reminded the viewer that he was “pro-life, pro-family.” Consequently, even when the conservative label was offered, it was offered with stipulations to remind the viewer what kind of conservative he was. The official campaign logo, seen in FIGURE 2., offered no suggestion of party affiliation. This was a popular trend in other candidate’s campaign ads. What was present in the ads was a nice complement of symbols and specific issues. Some of Blackwell’s ads offered patriotic language and an American flag in almost all the scenes when he spoke. Other ads drove home his diverse level of experience gained through his time in the Department of Housing & Urban Development and the U.N. Human Rights Commission. In addition, it was easy to access more details about his local policy plans with an *issue* tab that focused on social and economic concerns.

Interestingly, Ted Strickland’s commercials were more symbolic in nature and offered less substance than Blackwell’s ads. Strickland’s ads included titles like “Faith,” “Look Forward,” and “A Positive Plan” (Strickland, 2006). The ads said that Strickland wanted to fix public schools, make college more affordable, and generate job growth, but there was no roadmap offered on how to achieve these goals. Under the *Vision* tab on Strickland’s website, there were in-depth policy explanations, but these could not be found in the campaign ads. Similar to Blackwell’s ad, Strickland did not mention party affiliation, and signed-off his commercials with, as shown in FIGURE 3. ‘Turn Around Ohio.’”

In this race, both candidates played down their party affiliation, and kept their campaigns local. Assuming the campaigns were equal in tone and message, there was still one thing that the candidates could not change; their party. All things being equal, on Election Day there was still that unavoidable (R) or (D) next to the candidate's names. After two terms under a Republican governor and president, the flow of public opinion suggests the electorate would favor change. The election results support this thought, with Strickland's victory approaching landslide numbers with a 23% margin of victory.

FIGURE 3. Ads: Strickland and Healey



*Massachusetts: Healey (R) v. Patrick (D)**

Republican Kerry Healey offered one of the most comprehensive outlines for what she wished to accomplish in office. On her website (www.healeycommittee.com), Healey offered a 50 point outline in an online booklet, shown in FIGURE 3 that recommends ways that she could fix Massachusetts. Healey's webpage was easy to navigate and

offered plethora of information including press releases and a media center with commercials. However, one thing her official website did not offer was a mention of her party affiliation. It was difficult to locate the words *Republican* or *conservative* on any of the campaign material. It is understandable why a conservative candidate in Massachusetts, a state with two Democratic senators, would run a more centrist campaign. However, it was an uphill battle for the conservative candidate to capture a vacant gubernatorial seat in a more liberal state.

Democrat Deval Patrick's official website (<http://www.devalpatrick.com/index.cfm>) also provided the reader specific campaign issues, but its presentation was not as easy to observe as Healey's 50 point electronic booklet. Under the *Issues Overview* tab, Patrick highlighted the issues traditionally championed by liberal candidates. These issues included healthcare, the environment, and education. In a state that is often considered the bastion of liberalism, Patrick's campaign material only cautiously flashed the *Democratic* label. Patrick's victory was aided by the wave of anti-incumbency sentiment and unfavorable conservative policy. Some of these unfavorable policies included the plans to privatize social security, and create a guest worker immigration program.

In the top three gubernatorial races there was a pattern emerging that was easy to discern. At a time when there was immense anti-incumbent rhetoric, there were a variety of specific issues challenging candidates could support. The more conservative candidates in the three previous campaigns were running more of a centrist campaign.

This centering process was to be expected in model that suggests that liberal campaigns based on policy were more favorable than conservative campaigns run on symbols.

*Colorado: Beauprez (R) v. Ritter (D)**

During a time when the electorate grew weary of conservative policy, the DenverPost.com claimed that Bob Beauprez's lost his election bid because he ran a campaign that was too conservative. The most poignant criticism was Beauprez's rejection of business friendly Referendum C (Frates, 2006). The referendum would have eased restrictions on the state budget, but Beauprez favored returning money to the taxpayers. Frates of the Denver Post reported that this alienated less staunch and business friendly Republicans. The next day the DenverPost.com reported that Beauprez moved his campaign further to the right when he chose the ultra conservative Janet Rowland as a running mate (Crummy, 2006).

The Colorado race really tested the preference for conservative policy. The previous governor, a Republican, won the election by almost a two-thirds margin. This time the electorate was much less receptive to conservative policies. In their endorsement of Bill Ritter, the Denver Post commended Ritter's ability to unite and seek bipartisan solutions in the divided Colorado Congress (Bill Ritter: The best choice for Colorado, 2006). Ritter approached the gubernatorial race with more of a politically centrist tone than Beauprez and let Beauprez's campaign self destruct. The race was shaped by more local

issues like referendum C and taxes and was concerned less with national politics concerning the war.

*Arkansas: Hutchinson (R) v. Beebe (D)**

The previous title of homeland security deputy did not serve Asa Hutchinson well in the race for governor. Under an unpopular president and the botched response to hurricane Katrina, Hutchinson needed to overcome apparent close ties with the president and the overly bureaucratic Department of Homeland Security. In a southern state that rarely follows the lead of its neighboring states, the governor's seat went back and forth between Republicans and Democrats. From 1979 to 2007 the governor's seat switched parties through the elections of Clinton (D) in 1979, White (R) in 1981, Clinton (D) again in 1983, Tucker (D) in 1992, Huckabee (R) in 1996, and Beebe (D) in 2007. MSNBC reported that Hutchinson entered a tough race too late (Duffy, 2006). The successes and the national experience Hutchinson gained working on matters of national concern were of little value in the race for governor. The central issues as framed by the gubernatorial debates focused on more local issues like education and job growth (Vadala, 2006). Hutchinson's Democratic opponent, Mike Beebe, attacked his inability under the Department of Homeland Security to curb the flow of illegal immigrants across the Mexican Border (Vadala, 2006).

The race for governor in Arkansas personifies what has already been demonstrated in the previous races. Gubernatorial races were dominated by more local and specific issues

than matters of national security or the war in Iraq. Mike Beebe mustered the solid Democratic base in Arkansas and took the lead in identifying local issues. Beebe kept the debate in state, highlighting his experience as Arkansas's senator and attorney general. At the same time his campaign successfully dubbed Hutchinson as an outsider closely linked to an unpopular president.

Minnesota: Pawlenty (R) v. Hatch (DFL)*

The race for governor in Minnesota was the tightest race with incumbent Tim Pawlenty defeating his opponent by one percentage point. The previous races for governor upheld Stimson's notion that specific liberal policy should trump more symbolic national concerns under a conservative administration. Despite Pawlenty's election, the debate in Minnesota was dominated by concerns over taxes and the state budget deficit (Bakst, 2006). Pawlenty conducted a more centrist campaign and sought resolutions to traditionally liberal issues. During the third gubernatorial debate, Pawlenty offered solutions like more money for schools and two years of free college education to outstanding Minnesota students (Olson, 2006).

Hatch, of the Democratic Farmer Labor Party, focused on many of the same topics that Pawlenty focused on. There was little room for separation between the candidates that both concentrated on healthcare, education, and taxes. The combination of gaffes' by Hatch and his running-mate Dutcher likely cost them the Governors House. Hatch was caught referring to a local reporter in derogatory terms, while Dutcher fumbled a

question about E85 ethanol that exposed her lack of awareness of the locally manufactured commodity (Hatch pins loss partly on E85 error, 2006). It was difficult to see the use of symbols versus specific policy because both candidates rarely strayed too far from the center of the political spectrum. In the previously observed races for governor it was easier to evaluate each candidate's rhetoric. In this race and subsequent races, the candidates identified the same problems facing their state, and presented solutions that mostly offered more money.

In the campaigns examined thus far, local issues have dominated the debates, and the most unwieldy problem facing the nation, the Iraq War, has barely been brought up in the governors races. What was apparent in the previously mentioned election and will even be more obvious in the Maryland race for governor is that both candidates were choosing fairly liberal solutions to their problems. Without the conservative and liberal labels accompanying the candidates, it was difficult to decipher what party the candidate represented.

*Maryland: Ehrlich (R) v. O'Malley (D)**

The top agenda items for Ehrlich and O'Malley illustrated how centrist or even liberal the Republican candidate was willing to be when there was a shift away from conservative ideals. O'Malley proposed that the state spend \$400 million in school construction, freeze college tuition, and legalize slot machines at racetracks ("Where They Stand", 2006). Ehrlich, in his campaign proposed that schools spend at least \$338

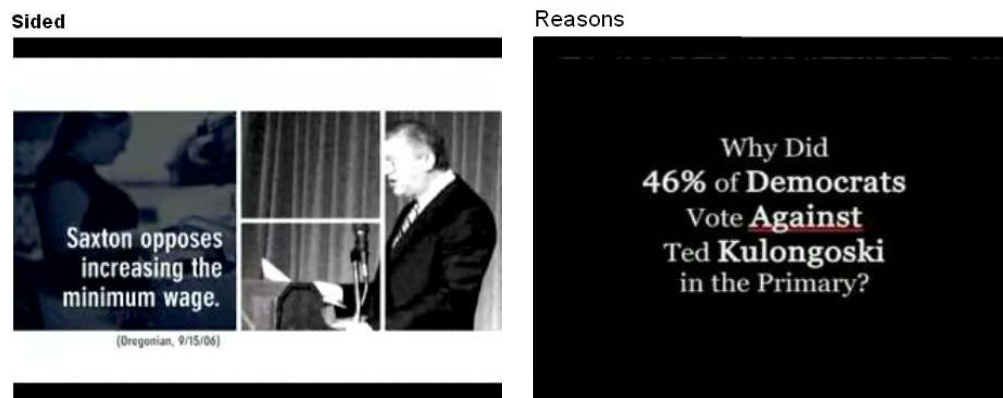
million in school construction, expand the number of charter schools, and legalize slot machines in a more general sense to increase revenue. O'Malley proposed increased funding for stem cell research, increased participation of children in the state health insurance program, and encouraged small business to purchase health insurance with tax credits. Ehrlich aligned with his Democratic opponent by suggesting the continual support for stem cell research, and seeking reform to allow more small business to purchase health insurance ("Where They Stand", 2006). With such a narrow gap between the candidates, perhaps the only thing to eliminate voter ambivalence was the candidate's party identification. If party identification was indeed the only the element separating the two candidates, then it was no wonder that with an anti-incumbency wave and an unpopular conservative administration, a liberal challenger won the election.

*Oregon: Saxton (R) v. Kulongoski (D)**

The Oregon election centered itself on similar topics like education, healthcare and public safety. Republican challenger Saxton asked a question that is popular in campaign seasons; "Are you satisfied with [location] state of affairs?" Two newspapers local to Oregon answered this question in two different ways. *The Oregonian*, answered "We're not" to the previous question ("Change begins at the top", 2006). Its top criticisms of Kulongoski included the fact that Oregon's funding of schools and the highway patrol was way below the national average and added the overall pessimism of the citizens of Oregon. It commended Kulongoski for being a "good man" but stated that it's time for a more vigorous figure to lead the state.

Vigor is exactly what was needed to completely consume all of the information available on Saxton's website, www.votesaxton.com. On the website Saxton provided explicit information about the problems that Oregon was facing and described what he would do in office. The tabs under the title "Action Plan" actually opened up into .pdf files with pages of text to read. Like the other Republican candidates, there was no mention of party affiliation or flashy symbolic material on the website.

The Portland Tribune also said they were not satisfied with Oregon's state of affairs, but quickly stated that one should never be "content" ("Kulongoski should stay", 2006). The *Tribune* praised Saxton for his qualifications but stated that Kulongoski knew how to improve the state. The endorsement recognized Oregon's setbacks and stated that Kulongoski did the best any administration could have done with an inherited recession. Partisan labels were hard to find in both candidates' campaign material. This was the case even in campaign ads that criticized the other candidate's past. Both candidates kept criticisms to specific events in each others' past and kept the symbolic messages to a minimum. Kulongoski ran an ad where he criticized his opponent for siding with big business and opposing a minimum wage increase, as shown in FIGURE 4 (Kulongoski, 2006). In FIGURE 4 Saxton's ad suggests that Kulongoski's leadership has been so poor that many Democrats voted against him in the primary (Saxton, 2006).

FIGURE 4. Ads: Kulongoski and Saxton

Governors Race Summary

The eight observed races indicate that elections for in-state representatives were consistent with Stimson's model that suggests that party popularity ebbs and flows in a cycle. After an extended period under a Republican administration, Democrats in seven of the eight observed races replaced a Republican office bearer. With the debate over the Iraq War almost entirely absent from in-state politics, the traditional notions remain valid. However, the presidential election of 2004 suggests that this may not be the case for national offices like the presidency or for senate.

Debates that stayed within state borders allowed conservative candidates to run a more centrist campaign without answering whether they support the war or not. Surprisingly, issues like national security took a back seat to issues like budgets and education that always seem to be present in state politics. Symbols were abandoned by both parties and a more reasoned approach was taken to attract voters. The one consistent issue that candidates successfully stereotyped their opponent on was taxes. In most of the eight

ances, one campaign policy the conservative candidate strictly affirmed to was the lowering or the promise of no new taxes. Throughout the 2006 midterm campaign season, the Republicans lead by the President promised more tax cuts and branded the Democrats as the party of big taxes and even bigger spending. However, this tactic proved not to be enough as Dick Armey noted in his commentary in *The Wall Street Journal*, the Republicans had just lost their “bread and butter” issue (Armey, 2006).

On the surface the entire midterm election seemed to be a referendum on the one man not on the ballot, President Bush. Looking at the state elections more closely, there is reason to believe that it was more of an ideological shift that one would expect after more than a six year stint under a divisive administration. The seven of the eight observed governorships did switch party control but this is more due to the debate on in-state politics than a referendum on the war or the President. The campaigns for senator who actually voted for the war presented a different scenario.

TABLE 2. 2006 Senate Race Rankings

* Indicates Winner

Source: 2006 National Journal Group, Inc.	
1	Pennsylvania Santorum (R) 41% v. Casey (D) 59% * Incumbent Rick Santorum (R)
2	Ohio DeWine (R) 44% v. Brown (D) 56% * Incumbent Mike DeWine (R)
3	Rhode Island Chafee (R) 47% v. Whitehouse (D) 53% * Incumbent Lincoln Chafee (R)
4	Virginia Allen (R) 49% v. Webb (D) 50% * Incumbent George Allen (R)
5	Montana Burns (R) 48% v. Tester (D) 49% * Incumbent Conrad Burns (R)
6	Missouri Talent (R) 47% v. McCaskill (D) 50% * Incumbent Jim Talent (R)
7	Maryland Steele (R) 44% v. Cardin (D) 54% * Open Seat
8	Arizona Kyl (R) 53% * v. Pederson (D) 44% Incumbent Jon Kyl (R)

CHAPTER III

SENATORS RACE ANALYSIS

*Pennsylvania: Santorum (R) v. Casey (D)**

It was clear from early on that Rick Santorum faced a difficult reelection to the senate. The list of things standing in his way included his support of an unpopular war, an unpopular president, and the overall disenchantment with the Republican Party (Zuckman, April 2006). Santorum first took the Pennsylvania Senate seat when there was overall disenchantment with the Democratic Party, and the Republicans took control of Congress in 1994. It seems similar elements amalgamated to remove the junior senator. Santorum championed social issues like opposition to abortion and same sex marriage that were more symbolic campaign issues than fiscal issues that many Pennsylvania residents would have liked to see addressed (Zuckman, 2006). The desire to replace Santorum was best summed up by a popular bumper sticker in Pennsylvania that stated "Bob Casey: Well... he's not Santorum" (Budoff, 2006).

Bob Casey, Santorum's challenger in the Pennsylvania Senate race, ran a more low key campaign than Santorum. Casey often responded to questions in the vaguest manner and sometimes in his response did not even answer the question (Budoff, 2006). This tactic proved to be beneficial early in the campaign as Casey allowed the anti-incumbent sentiment tear away support from Santorum. The anybody but Santorum sentiment made it possible for the anti-abortion Casey to find support broader than his Democratic Party.

A poll late in the 2006 Midterm Elections suggested that up to 30% of Casey supporters supported him because of the fact he was not Santorum (Finkel, 2006).

Even before deciphering whether a campaign was symbolic or specific, the Pennsylvania Senate race introduced a new factor that was not present in the in the governors' races. This race indicated that for Pennsylvania residents, this race at some level was a referendum on an unpopular president and war. The 2006 midterms were the toughest for the politicians who aligned themselves too closely with the President (Cummings, 2006). This was also the case for Senators who continued to support the war. Previously popular Senator Lieberman of Connecticut lost his Democratic Primary because he continued to support the war and had to win a senate seat as an Independent who would later caucus with the Democrats.

*Ohio: DeWine (R) v. Brown (D)**

The Senate race in Ohio continued to contrast the trends that were apparent in the governors races. Social issues were less prominent issues, and potential senators were consistently faced with the concerns over terrorism and Iraq. The same symbolic messages of God and patriotism that delivered Ohio to the Republicans in the 2004 elections were not enough to muster support in the 2006 midterms (Koff and Sloat, 2006). Social issues like abortion could not compete with immediate pressing concerns associated with the war. An AP exit poll suggested that opposition to the President and the war gave Sherrod Brown an early lead that sustained him through the election

(PBS.org, 2006). Another significant element leading up to the election included the allegations of poor ethical decisions committed by incumbent Republicans. This included Ohio Representative Bob Ney's guilty plea for accepting gifts from the infamous Jack Abramoff.

This marked the second senate race that was decided by forces outside the campaign. Both Ohio candidates aired negative campaign ads that painted the opponent as weak on terrorism. Brown's ad described DeWine's practices in the senate as a rubber stamp on Bush policy and ultimately served as an attack ad against DeWine (PBS.org, 2006). Perhaps the sharpest attack ad was aired by DeWine (FIGURE 5) that included images of DeWine greeting firefighters, the next seen showed terrorist training camps, and an image of the Twin Towers with a caption that asked "Sherrod Brown Protecting America?" (DeWine, 2006). This ad was in line with the national approach that Republicans campaigned on that dictated Democratic opponents as weak on terror and big on taxes.

FIGURE 5. Ads: DeWine and Whitehouse



*Rhode Island: Chafee (R) v. Whitehouse (D)**

The Rhode Island Senate race showed truly how polarizing the President and the Republican Party had become. Lincoln Chafee was by far the most liberal Republican in the senate. He opposed the Bush tax cuts, the war in Iraq, and the President's Supreme Court nominees (Klein, 2006). However, all of these credentials were not enough to save the moderate Republican. The same Boston Globe article showed that before the election in Rhode Island, support for the President had fallen to 22% and the challenger Sheldon Whitehouse enjoyed a 5 point lead over Chafee. Chafee continually tried to distance himself from the President, and claimed that his election would only double the voting power of the senior Democratic Senator Jack Reed of Rhode Island. The only discernable difference between Chafee and Whitehouse was that if elected Chafee would vote for a Republican Senate leader.

Once again this race was largely affected by elements from outside the state. Residents of Rhode Island expressed no ill will toward Chafee but stated that the race was not about him, but the President. Chafee turned out to be another casualty of an unpopular President in a state where the people openly expressed that their vote was a referendum on the President. It was clear that realignment was in the works. Chafee and Whitehouse shared more than their liberal preferences. Both candidates came from well known families, their fathers were WWII vets and roommates at Yale, and both had children that attended the same school (Murray, 2006). The only thing that Chafee could not avoid during the realignment process was his party affiliation. Other than concerns about

the war and President, Chafee's foremost hurdle was to distance himself from the President while Whitehouse campaigned hard to establish a strong relationship. The campaign ad ran by Whitehouse shown in FIGURE 5 offered an almost cynical message with an unpopular President and an even more unpopular Vice President in the background (Whitehouse, 2006). While Whitehouse's challenge was to dodge allegations about his inability to stop institutionalized crime through law enforcement (Murray, 2006).

*Virginia: Allen (R) v. Webb (D)**

The Virginia Senate race delineated from the races analyzed thus far, in that the mistakes made by the incumbent George Allen were as poignant as or more distressing to his campaign than the mistakes made by the President or in the handling of Iraq. In a race that Allen should have won easily, as evidenced by his popularity and rumors about his future plans to run for President, a series of gaffes marked him as a culturally insensitive person (West, 2006). These mistakes were so egregious that they opened the door for a political novice to grab senate seat from a red state. Allen's foremost mistake was calling young man of south Asian origins "macaca" a term that some considered a slur and Allen claimed was a made-up term. Unfortunately for Allen, this incident was not only reported on but made nationally infamous through the online video feed, Youtube.com. Other issues that Allen's campaign had to respond to included the rebel flag that hung in his house, the noose that hung in his office, and the recognition of his Jewish ancestry accompanied by joke in poor taste about a ham sandwich (Fisher, 2006). All of these

blunders combined with the debate about a war created the perfect storm for the ousting of an incumbent.

Perhaps the best use symbolic campaigning was utilized by Democrat Jim Webb. He famously wore the combat boots of his son shown in FIGURE 6. (webbforsenate.com, 2006) who shipped out in September 2006 to serve in Iraq (Toner, 2006). Webb, a Vietnam veteran and from a family with a long standing tradition of military service made the opposition of the Iraq War the key note of his campaign. It was easier for him to deflect allegations that many Republicans wielded against anti-war Democrats characterizing them as weak on defense and national security. Webb not only served in the armed forces, but during the election had a son deployed in Iraq which made it easier for him to say that he supported the troops but not the war. Webb's biggest mistake was revived from 27 years earlier when he wrote that he opposed women in combat and the Naval Academy (Toner, 2006). However, this mistake did not endure in the limelight, and Allen's mistake eclipsed Webb's slipups.

FIGURE 6. Ads: Webb and Tester



Jon Tester - Every Penny



*Montana: Burns (R) v. Tester (D)**

The Montana Senate race gained in prominence as it became clearer that this desolate state may determine the swing of power between the Democrats and Republicans. As both parties pumped more funds into the campaigns, Conrad Burns and Jon Tester exchanged more heated allegations through television ads. Both candidates focused more on each others mistakes and disabilities rather than offer specific solutions to the state's concerns. Tester ran a negative ad about Burns and the Republican led Congress (FIGURE 6) criticizing their pet projects or pork barreling tactics (Tester, 2006). Burns touted his ability draw two billion dollars in appropriations for Montana through his seat in the Senate Appropriations Committee (Paulson, 2006). However, he had to shield himself from allegations that claimed he was the top political beneficiary of Jack Abramoff; taking almost \$150,000 from the infamous lobbyist (Miele, 2006).

Montana marked another race where the merits of the campaign were less relevant than the previous ills of the candidates or their parties. Burns's campaign tried to focus on some of the traditionally accepted platforms of the Republican Party like smaller government and lower taxes. The moderate Tester challenged the Republican base with his anti-gun control and gay marriage stance. Burns continued to muster support from the party base by branding his opponent as a "tax-and-spend liberal" (Robbins, 2006). While Tester went beyond the negative campaigning and struck accord with the independents when he challenged Burns on his support of the Patriot Act. This seemed

to have given the edge to Tester who won the election with almost 4,000 more votes (Robbins, 2006).

*Missouri: Talent (R) v. McCaskill (D) **

In Missouri's tight senate race, an issue other than the war and president played a critical role on Election Day. Missouri's proposed *amendment 2* prohibited the state from restricting research on embryonic stem cell research (Manier, 2006). Early in the race both candidates stayed away from this decisive issue, as most candidates do when there is not clear support for an issue. This changed in the weeks heading up to the election as Democratic challenger Claire McCaskill came out in support of *amendment 2* that would make it easier to research stem cells in Missouri. McCaskill bolstered her stance with one of the most symbolic ads that showed actor Michael J. Fox who has Parkinson's, ask for the support of Missourians so that there one day may be a cure for his as well as others illness. This ad shown in FIGURE 7 made the viewers uneasy as they watched a man endure the effects of Parkinson's disease (McCaskill, 2006). The stem cell issue divided voters as they questioned when life begins and is it ethical to discard an embryo to make another person's life more fruitful.

Talent, the incumbent Republican opposed the amendment. He too enlisted some big names like President Bush and former New York City Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani to help in the campaign. President Bush stayed on topic as he focused on tax cuts and the Republicans' ability to fight terrorism (Hennessy-Fiske, 2006). This was an interesting

tactic aimed at mobilizing the party base but would not excite Independents. McCaskill knew her support of the stem cell amendment would alienate conservatives but would also find support among a broader group of the electorate (Zuckman, 2006). In a close race that included an unpopular war and President, an issue like stem cell research was just enough give McCaskill a narrow victory.

FIGURE 7. Ad: McCaskill

Michael J. Fox



*Maryland: Steele (R) v. Cardin (D)**

Democrat Benjamin Cardin actively made the Maryland Senate election into a referendum on the President and the war. This was possible not only because of the rising costs associated with the war, but because Cardin while in Congress voted against sending troops into Iraq (Mosk and Wagner, 2006). This in conjunction with the fact that the state has twice as many Democrats as Republicans made it an uphill battle for Michael Steele. Campaign ads flew at a frenzied pace as candidates for senate and governor together aired more than 15,000 ads costing almost \$18 million (Mosk and

Wagner, 2006). At first this race was considered competitive because of the open seat left by Democrat Sarbanes. That was not the case as an exit poll suggested “Voters who said the Iraq War was extremely important to their decision supported Cardin by a 3-1 ratio” (Mosk and Wagner, 2006). Steele’s strategy was to depict his opponent, the 10 term Congressman as a political insider who is out of touch with the mainstream Maryland residents. The race culminated into a victory with a 10% margin for Cardin over Steele.

Arizona: Kyl (R) v. Pederson (D)*

This was the first race where instate concerns trumped the war. In Arizona, boarder security and immigration were the focal points of the senate race. Jon Kyl was known for his tough stance against illegal immigration and his opposition to the guest worker program supported by John McCain the senior senator from his state (Barabak, 2006). He primarily opposed the plan drafted by the President because it offered a path to citizenship for individuals who had entered this country illegally. His tough and unwavering stance in support of enforcement of immigration laws got him the endorsement of Arizona’s largest newspaper, *Arizona Republic* that named John McCain “Amnesty John” (Barabak, 2006). The immigration and boarder issue alone were not enough to grant Kyl reelection because neither he nor his opponent offered more comprehensive solutions than enforce, build a wall, create paths to citizenship. It seemed Arizona residents had heard every side of the debate and wanted to hear more than “sound-bite solutions” (Barabak, 2006).

His opponent, the Democratic Jim Pederson, created what he considered to be the solution with his part enforcement and part guest worker compromise. Kyl criticized his opponent on being weak on boarder security and immigration law enforcement. Pederson called his opponent a “rubber stamp” on the Bush Administration and questioned the tax breaks he supported for oil companies (Barabak, 2006). The debate over the Iraq War not void in the senate race as Pederson’s ad shown in FIGURE 8. showed his endorsement from Iraq War veterans (Pederson, 2006). This ad featuring veterans from the war pointed out the mistakes and shortfalls of the Bush foreign policy.

Both candidates exchanged sharp criticisms in both campaign ads and in debates. This mostly red state left open the possibility for a Democrat to seize a senate seat under a particularly bad year for incumbent Republicans. The get tougher approach that many Arizona residents wanted had its limits and would not allow either candidate to coast to an easy election based on their immigration stance alone. These limits were evident when Republican Candidate Don Goldwater lost in the primaries because of his hard-line approach to illegal immigration and his proposed creation of a “tent-city” for the detention of undocumented immigrants (Barabak, 2006). It seemed the state was too red for a liberal candidate to remove an incumbent from a southern boarder state. If more concerns like healthcare and education, issues that usually drive preference for liberalism were more important topics the race might have been closer.

FIGURE 8. Ad: Pederson

Iraq Veterans in Support of Jim Pederson US Senate



Senate Race Summary

The senate races were dominated by external elements that overshadowed concerns from within the state. Unlike the governors' races, there was little to no specific or symbolic language that resonated more in the electorate's conscious than the war with mounting casualties and a President who was seen as increasingly stubborn. It was interesting to see how the incumbent Republican Governors tried to deflect questions about their support or nonsupport of the war and bring the debate back to local issues like education and healthcare. In the senate race, similar tactics failed and the mood in general for conservative leadership turned sour.

The President consistently tried to make the election about the war on terror, the need to stay the course in Iraq, and lower taxes. The first two agenda items seemed to point to the elements that won the President reelection in 2004; the conditions that made it seem that uncertain times were not a time for leadership change. However, after US casualties

surpassed 3,000 in Iraq and the time spent there surpassed the time US spent in WWII, the electorate clearly wanted a change. In the top eight races in the senate, seven of them were won by the Democratic Party. In these races, types of campaign messages whether specific or symbolic, were less relevant than which party the messages came from. The use of symbols in the senate races were however more stark than was visible in the governors races as evidenced by images of the Twin Towers, Jim Webb's use of his son's combat boot, and Michael J. Fox's tremors from Parkinson's disease. Therefore, unlike the governors' races, the senate races were conducted in the shadow of the President and the war.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

Prior to closely examining the races for senate and governor, it would have been easy to say that the 2006 Midterm Elections were a referendum on a President and a war.

However, that would not explain the election of new governors who were largely elected because of instate issues like, healthcare, education, taxes, and job growth. Therefore, through further examination it was clear that the President and the war influenced the senate races, but the election for governors indicated more of a realignment that one should have expected by observing the graph in FIGURE 1. Support for Liberal Policy.

In the governors' races, it was possible to discern symbolic language from specific languages. There was however a significant centering of campaigns that limited candidates from straying too far to the left or too far to the right on the political spectrum. Specific messages that dealt with key instate issues found a receptive audience. Conservative candidates also created campaigns that offered detailed solutions, while some liberal candidates created more symbolic campaigns than their Republican challengers. Both of these incidents showed candidates reaching for more than their base and indicated attempts to attract moderates and even some weak Republicans or Democrats.

In the senate, the candidates could not shift the debate from national concerns to more local state concerns. When incumbents who supported the war tried to shift the debate, their ploy only worked momentarily and the Iraq War took center stage. In the senate it would have been interesting to see what realignment would have looked like had the President and the war had not been the focal points. The governors' races showed realignment supportive of the traditional notions that suggested that after a considerable period of time under a conservative administration there electorate would support liberal policy over more conservative policy. However, the war raged on and the President continued to be a decisive force that incumbents tried to distance themselves from. These elements increased the intensity of liberal support. Whereas the governors saw realignment based on local issues that usually created wholesale the changes in the chambers of congress, the anti-incumbent mood in the senate races was driven with a new intensity.

The governors' races upheld the traditionally held beliefs that support for liberal policy swings back and forth like a pendulum. In the Fall of 2006 the electorate had spent more than six years under a conservative administration that was not afraid to alienate those outside their party base. The pendulum had reached far to the right, and the question was would it continue to move to the right like it did during 2004. George W. Bush won reelection party because of the uncertain times created the by the war on terror and the war in Iraq. The electorate did not want hinder the implementation of war by ushering in a new administration. During the 2004 elections, conservative symbols were still more

popular than specific liberal policy. The Republican Campaign successfully branded the liberals as weak on defense and John Kerry an inept leader to orchestrate a war.

Those same tactics were not enough as power swung swiftly from the Republican hands into Democratic hands. The governors' seats, the House of Representatives, and the senate all went from majority Republican to majority Democratic through one election night. The anti-incumbency and pro-liberal mood had changed so much that there was no reason to expect that the executive office would have seen a change in parties had the President been up for reelection. Some things did change after election night as the President made some concessions that some felt he should have made before the election. Soon after the election, he replaced the former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld that was as divisive a figure as the President, if not more, with a more pragmatic Robert Gates.

The change of power in the senate did not entirely support the traditional notions of realignment because for the most part they did not focus on liberal policy issues. The preference for the liberal candidate in the senate race had to do more for their anti-war sentiment. However, some Democratic Senators owe their election to the simple fact that they were not Republicans. In that sense the shift of power occurred because the electorate had spent six years under a conservative President and almost 13 years under a conservative congress. Governors' races showed that the electorate was willing to choose more liberal policy over less specific conservative policy. In the senate the

electorate seemed to vote against a war and President, rather than for liberal policy. In 2004 symbols of conservatism reminded the electorate of the Republican's strong reputation in fighting terror and preserved all branches of the government for the Republicans. In 2006 however, the Republicans had made America too conservative and reminding the electorate that they lived in uncertain times was not enough to stop the realignment that could have occurred in 2004.

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